

"Church Leaders Are Always Right"

John 18:28

April 6, 2011

Lent 5

Church leaders often have great power to control their people. Here in our country, we have seen TV preachers who convince people to send in their money, even though the people don't have much money and can't afford it. The money is supposed to support their "ministry", but often ends up supporting wealthy lifestyles for the preacher. I won't use any names (and give them even more publicity), but a quick search on the internet shows many of the TV preachers taking in several million dollars a year and living very fine lives.

Sometimes it gets worse. We have preachers who have controlled people's lives and convince people to do strange things. I was recently watching a TV program about Jim Jones. He was a preacher about 30 years ago who led a group of "believers" from California to South America to set up a Christian community. That was odd enough. Some of you remember what happened. Jim Jones became very paranoid and convinced more than 900 followers to commit suicide with him by drinking Kool Aid which had poison in it.

Why do people follow these people - give up their money and even their lives? They believe that these leaders are speaking the truth from God and that they are always right. Yet, throughout the ages, church leaders have often been very hypocritical and deceptive.

The Jewish church leaders - priests - are a good example in our text for this evening. They come to Pontius Pilate's palace and they refuse to enter there. Why? Because that would break a religious rule and they would become "unclean." If they entered the palace and became "unclean", then they could not eat the Passover supper later. This is crazy! These leaders are bringing an innocent man - Jesus - to the governor because they want him to crucify Him and they are worried about religious rules. What hypocrisy!

What dishonesty as well! Satan - the Father of lies - had influenced them to lie in order to kill Jesus. Jewish law required a trial to take place in front of the entire council during the day. Jesus' trial happened in front of some council members at night. If the Jewish council wanted to execute someone, they had to have two trials with one day in between. Jesus had two quick trials with a few hours in between. A fair trial has a certain order - the charge, true evidence & honest witnesses, and the verdict of punishment. In Jesus' trial, the leaders first decided the punishment - death, brought in false evidence and witnesses who lied, and then decided what to charge Him with - BLASPHEMY - speaking against God.

These church leaders and their actions were not right. They were wrong. And what happened? These Jewish church leaders were supposed to lead people in God's ways, speak the truth from God and proclaim the Messiah. Instead, they led people away from God. They lied to protect their power, wealth, and prestige. They killed the Messiah.

That kind of lying and deceit continues today. Some religious leaders lie to gain money, power, and control of people. Some pastors also lie to protect themselves and their jobs. Satan - the Father of Lies - is certainly busy. He destroyed JUDAS. He almost destroyed Peter. And he corrupted the Jewish religious leaders and corrupts some religious leaders today. People become confused by all this. Some reject Christianity. What do we do?

We reject Satan and his lies. First, we turn our attention to Jesus and His truth first. Second, we are careful about paying attention to human leaders. Jesus said, "I am the Way and the *Truth* and the Life. No one goes to the Father but through Me." It is Jesus Himself who can bring people to God, not church leaders. These Jewish church leaders brought Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion, but it was Jesus who actually endured the cross. It was Jesus who suffered the punishment for our sins and iniquities, not the Jewish priests. It was Jesus who died and forgives your sins, not pastors. It was Jesus who rose from the dead and became alive so that we could live forever in heaven, not any church leaders.

Today, it is Jesus who gives you peace with God and all of His blessings when you confess your sins and receive Holy Absolution and when you attend the Lord's Supper. True - it is the pastor who speaks the forgiveness and it is the pastor giving you Jesus' body with the bread and Jesus' blood with the wine. Nevertheless, it is still Jesus speaking, "I forgive you all your sins;" it is still Jesus giving you His body and blood and saying, "Take and eat; this IS my body given for you; take and drink; this is my blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins."

Where do we learn all of that wonderful news? From God's Word - the Bible. Jesus Himself once prayed to his Father in heaven, "YOUR Word is truth." And we believe this to be God's Word for us today. I often tell people, "Don't believe something because I, the pastor, said so; believe because God's Word says so." When the Bible says, "You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," believe it; it's the truth. When the Bible says, "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin," and "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness;" believe that, too; it's the truth. And, when the Bible says, "You have been saved by God's grace through faith; it is not yourselves. It is a gift of God," believe that, too; it is the truth.

Whenever you are looking for any knowledge about God and His attitude to you, let God's Word alone guide you. When you are searching for God's way for your life, let God's Word alone guide you. And pastors' sermons and church leaders' teachings - compare them with God's Word to make sure that they are true and right before you trust them and follow them.

Many church leaders are good, honest and faithful. We should not distrust all leaders or reject all pastors as some people would say. The Bible says that we should honor and obey our leaders as they teach us God's Word and lead us in God's ways.

Yet remember: all church leaders are sinners, too, and make mistakes. Satan wants us to believe the lie that "church leaders are always right" so that false preachers and dishonest leaders can fool us and lead us away from God as the Jewish church leaders fooled their people and lead them away from God's Messiah. Do not let that happen. Do not let Satan fool you. During this

Lenten season, remember who is truth and what is truth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came, suffered for your iniquities, died on the cross, and rose from the dead to insure that your sins are forgiven. You have peace with God and you, too, will rise and live forever with Him in heaven. That saving message, that Gospel, God communicates clearly and accurately to you in His Word - the Bible. Put your faith in Him Who is Truth and set your heart upon God's Word which communicates truth. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Amen.